DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 962 SP 026 452

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TITLE French & Raven's Power Bases: An Appropriate Focus for Educational Researchers and Practitioners.
PUB DATE 12 Apr 85
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; *Individual Power; *Leadership Styles; Research Needs; Role Models; *Student Attitudes; Student Motivation; *Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Influence; *Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

"Whether it is to further learning in general, or discipline in particular, teachers must effectively exercise power." Five power bases available to teachers are identified in this paper each containing the common element that they are all dependent upon student beliefs. These power bases are: (1) coercive power, based on a student's belief that the teacher possesses the ability to punish or refrain from punishing; (2) reward power, based on a student's belief that the teacher possesses the ability to distribute or withhold rewards; (3) legitimate power, based on a student's belief that teachers have the right, given their position, to prescribe behavior within an assigned domain; (4) referent power, based on a student's identification with the teacher as a role model; and (5) expert power, based on the student's belief that the teacher possesses some special knowledge or expertise. An analysis is offered of each of the five power bases and how it may be enhanced or eroded. Research on the relationship between power bases and selected learning outcomes (e.g., student achievement) is discussed, and questions about power bases still in need of investigation are identified. (JD)

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FRENCH & RAVEN'S POWER BASES: AN APPROPRIATE FOCUS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

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Paper presented at The Educational Research Association Craft Knowledge Seminar. Friady, April 12, 1985, University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland.

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FRENCH & RAVEN'S POWER BASES: AN APPROPRIATE FOCUS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

BERA Conference - Teachers' Craft Knowledge
University of Stirling

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INTRODUCTION

According to Nyberg (1981, p.63), "The idea of power has lain more completely neglected in education studies than in any other discipline that is of fundamental social interest." As Common (1983, p.206) writes, "We all know perfectly well what it (power) is -- until someone asks us. Yet power is fundamental to an understanding of people, their motives, their goals, and their actions..." No place is such an understanding of power needed more than in today's classrooms. Educational researchers can play a significant part in furthering this understanding.

How has the term power been defined? McCroskey and Richmond (1983, p.176), see ".... power as the capacity to influence another person to do something he/she would not have done had he/she not been influenced." In schools, even if students may eventually get around to doing that something on their own, for example reading, a teacher's job is to add efficiency and effectiveness to the process. To do this teachers must, in fact they can't help but, exercise power. Although teachers do not possess complete control over children's learning, as one has over turning on a light switch or water tap, the potential for substantial teacher power exists, and is worthy of serious investigation. If a general goal of facilitating student learning is not enough of an incentive to

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study teacher power, then consider the specific goal of improving classroom and school discipline. Whether discipline is a problem or just the symptom of a problem, today's parents, teachers, and community leaders see it as a major problem in education (e.g. Gallup, 1984). Teachers are expected to establish discipline as a necessary, but certainly not sufficient, condition for learning to occur.

What social bases of power are available to the teacher? Although an endless number of specific examples of power could be identified, it is more useful to establish a finite number of categories into which the examples can be classified. According to Tauber (1985), we can draw upon the business world's long-time study of the exercise of power in the form of French and Raven's (1960) potential bases of power: coercive, reward, legitimate, referent, and expert. The remaining part of this paper will define and discuss each of the five power bases, offer research on the relationship between power bases and selected learning outcomes (e.g. student achievement), and identify questions about power bases still in need of investigation.

FIVE CATEGORIES OF POWER

COERCIVE POWER. Coercive Power is based on a student's belief that the teacher (head teacher, parent, etc.) possesses the ability to punish or refrain from punishing. Such punishment takes the form of supplying, or threatening to supply, aversives such as fear, embarrassment and humiliation, boredom, pain, and physical discomfort. One has to supply at least moderate amounts of punishment in order to expect even minor behavioral changes, and supply severe amounts in order to expect moderate behavioral changes. Students comply with a teacher's wishes in order to escape being punished. The more students see that there is no avenue of escape, the more effective coercive power will be. Characteristics associated with the exercise of coercive power include, continuous and exhaustive teacher monitoring, immediate, though short-lasting effects, compliance rather than cooperation, a weakened teacher-student relationship, and undesirable student coping mechanisms such as rebelling, retaliating (if not at the teacher, at a

weaker classmate), lying, cheating, conforming, submitting, and withdrawing (either physically or mentally) from learning.

The effectiveness of a teacher's coercive power may be lessened by the "...probability of perceived punishment from other sources (e.g. from peers, the behavior itself, etc.) if the student does comply with the teacher's influence attempt" (McCroskey and Richmond, 1983, p.176). It can also be lessened, and at times completely undermined, by the fact that what the teacher may think is an aversive is not always seen as such by the student (e.g. efforts at embarrassment interpreted by the student as attention).

REWARD POWER. A teacher's reward power is based on a student's belief that the teacher possesses the ability to distribute or withhold rewards not obtainable elsewhere. Although reward power involves introducing something the student views as pleasant (positive reinforcement), such as recognition, tangibles, consumables, and privileges, it also involves removing something the student views as unpleasant (negative reinforcement). Although both are equally powerful in getting students to do what one wants them to do, the latter circumstance is often overlooked. The key to the effective use of reward power, as with coercive power, is to be able to tell how much of which reward (or aversive), delivered how frequently and for how long a period of time is best for each student. Clearly, reward power also demands continuous and exhaustive teacher monitoring.

LEGITIMATE POWER. Legitimate power is based on a student's belief that teachers have the right, given their position, to prescribe behavior within an assigned domain. It is the accepted function of teachers to assign homework, of judges to assign sentences, and of clergy to assign penance. A recognized and accepted hierarchy of power is seen to exist within many institutions. At home, parents have legitimate power over children; at work, employers have legitimate power over employees. In schools, head teachers have a right to tell teachers what to do and, in turn, teachers have a right to tell students what to do. That is how our social world operates.

Legitimate power shows respect for the position held by a person, not necessarily for the person himself/herself. A salute given to a superior officer in the armed services is executed, not out of respect for the person in the uniform, but for the rank that uniform depicts. Students tend to "buy into" or accept such positional hierarchies out of belief that their turn will come too. Students who take directions from 6th Form Precepts in comprehensive schools, or fraternity pledges who take orders from upper classmen, surely expect that someday it will be their turn to be giving directions that they expect to be followed.

REFERENT POWER. Referent power is based on a student's identification with the teacher and his/her desire to be like him/her. Unlike legitimate power, which is a positional power, referent power is a personal power. The person, not necessarily the position, is respected. As a personal power, it travels with the teacher from the classroom to lunch duty, from the playground to the assembly hall, and beyond the school confines. Such power wielders are usually seen as possessing desirable personal characteristics that the less powerful person wishes to emulate. Teachers with referent power often see students wanting to be like them; a sense of oneness exists. Although coercive and reward powers are seen to be manipulative, and thus one could expect resistance on the part of students, these same students willingly consent to being influenced (manipulated) by teachers with referent power. Students actually look for opportunities to be of service to persons whom they respect.

EXPERT POWER. A teacher's expert power is based on the student's belief that the teacher possesses some special knowledge or expertise. Students see this knowledge as important for achieving the task at hand. According to McCroskey and Richmond (1983, p.177), "Most information taught in a classroom is presented from a base of expert power." The information is often simply accepted as fact because teachers are seen as competent and knowledgeable. The greater this student perception, the greater the expert power.

Like referent power, expert power is a personal power, derived from the personal

characteristics of the power wielder. As such, it too is portable; it goes where the teacher goes. At times, people with expert power in one area are seen to be an expert in other areas as in the case in which a prominent medical doctor serves on a governing committee of a school. Expert power also has something in common with legitimate power -- an ability to capitalize upon internalized values of authority and knowledge that have been reinforced in the home and society (Tauber and Knouse, 1984). To the extent that students come from homes in which respect for position (e.g. parents, police, government, etc.) and respect for knowledge (e.g. need for schooling, love of reading, etc.) are valued, to that extent teacher's legitimate power and expert power, respectively, will be enhanced.

WHO ACTUALLY WIELDS THE POWER?

The common element in the definition of each of French and Raven's five power bases is that all are dependent upon student beliefs. If the beliefs change, the power changes. Teachers wield power only to the extent that students perceive that teachers, in fact, have such power. Power is something that is in the hands of the person on whom the power is being wielded, not in the hands of the presumed power wielder -- in our case, the teacher. People, including students, must consent to power being used on them before such power can be effective. As a result, such consent is a form of power over power (Nyberg, 1981). For many teachers this is a disturbing revelation.

DURATION OF POWER BASES

The real locus of control of power, in the hands of students' beliefs, is reinforced when one examines how long one can expect each power base to work? In each case the answer is as long as students' beliefs or perceptions remain unchanged. Coercive power becomes ineffective as soon as the student perceives the teacher is no longer able to dispense aversives. Students could move on to a different classroom, could rely upon court decisions and community pressures outlawing corporal punishment, could physically

grow in stature in which case teachers would be foolish to try and inflict pain, etc. They could also simply change their perceptions on the value of high grades or good 'O' levels and 'A' levels such that failure is no longer seen as an aversive. It is difficult to imagine a situation, short of supplying an aversive so severe that it would violate a student's rights, that could force a student to do what he/she did not want to do.

Reward power, too, becomes ineffective as soon as students perceive teachers as no longer the sole individuals able to dispense rewards. Growing circles of friends, greater mental and physical competence, part-time jobs, changing views on what is rewarding, etc., all contribute to a greater independence on the part of the student. Teachers, and for that matter, parents, end up simply no longer in a position to control the flow of rewards.

Legitimate power ceases when either students stop accepting the rights of a teacher's position, or more often, when teachers are perceived to overstep their legitimate power domain. This is reflected in student statements such as, "Just because you are the teacher, it does not give you the right to....." Such a statement clearly implies that students do accept the legitimate power of a teacher -- up to a point.

Legitimate power, most often related to mundane matters, is clearly not a substitute for power bases, such as expert power, which are more applicable to cognitive and affective growth. Saying a student should learn such and such because you are the teacher and you say so, or the curriculum of the school says so, is clearly not the same thing as demanding students raise their hand to be recognized, or expecting them to complete assigned homework problems. The former oversteps the boundaries of legitimate power, while the latter does not.

Although referent power is also at the whim of students' perceptions, it is difficult to think of an example in which referent power could erode as easily and as quickly as the previous three power bases. Being based on a valuing of the person, like all values, it is rather hardy and longer lasting. Although not easily changed, it

could be altered given more drastic circumstances. The teacher, once looked up to, could be shown to have cheated, lied, or done something similarly damaging that pulls him/her down off a pedestal. Expert power, although not as resilient as referent power, could erode given conditions such as when the student no longer needs the knowledge or expertise possessed by the teacher, or the teacher is shown to be incompetent.

ENHANCEMENT OF POWER BASES

No matter the power bases used by teachers, as professionals they have an obligation to use them effectively. Coercive and rewards powers can be enhanced by knowing and by following the well published operant learning (behavior modification) guidelines associated with the two. Among others, such "rules-of-thumb" include, selecting the right reward or aversive, deciding on the correct schedule of reinforcement or punishment -- starting with a fixed ratio and moving toward variable ratio, supplying rewards and aversives immediately upon exhibition of targeted student behaviors -- the latter made more difficult by recent due process student rights' laws, and offering rewards (as well as aversives) in quantities large enough to be effective, yet small enough to avoid saturation or permanent mental or physical damage.

Legitimate power can be enhanced by a school and community-wide effort to clarify who is the designated boss in the classroom and what are the parameters of that influence. Teachers, like most employees, have been contracted to do a job and that job is to keep the learning act afloat. To that end they have certain assigned powers. Although basically used for mundane matters, effectively applied legitimate power can be more effective, and it is far less likely to be taken personally, than coercive or reward power. It is also true that aversives and rewards supplied from a legitimate power base are more effective than either coercive power or reward power alone.

Referent power can be cultivated, in spite of the feeling of many teachers that this area is the "art" part of teaching — one is either born with it or they don't have it. But teachers need help to develop a way of interacting with children such that they

begin to respect the teacher as a person. Learning, and putting into practice, a communication model such as Gordon's (1974), Teacher Effectiveness Training, in which teachers first define ownership of problems and then select congruent responses, could be a first step. Here teachers act as facilitators and use active listening skills when the student owns the problem, use I-messages rather than you-messages as confrontation skills when the teacher owns the problem, use conflict resolution skills when both own the problem, and use values clarification when there is a collision of values. In each circumstance both the student's and the teacher's needs are met -- a prerequisite to developing referent power's feeling of oneness. Glasser's (1969) Reality Therapy, shifting the responsibility on to the student's shoulders for coming up with a plan to modify his/her unacceptable behavior, and Dinkmeyer and Dinkmeyer's (1976) use of logical and natural consequences, rather than contrived consequences (punishment), are two additional sets of teacher skills that convey referent power qualities of trust and responsibility, and fairness, respectively.

Finally, expert power can be enhanced by systematically sharing with students, parents, and the community at large, the simple truth about teacher qualifications and experience. Educators need to "toot their own horn" once in a while. Like the doctor and the lawyer who line their waiting room walls with diplomas and degrees, so too should educators have a chance to share their credentials, as well as any other legitimate evidence of expertness. One result of such efforts would be to have students coming into classrooms expecting quality instruction, and, if for no other reason, the self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) triggered by such student expectations would help such expectations materialize.

POWER BASES AND LEARNING

According to McCroskey and Richmond (1984, p.135), "...the communication of power in the classroom has a major association with student learning, both cognitive and affective." The authors used Perceived Power Measure (PPM) and Relative Power Measure

(RPM) instruments to measure perceived teacher power, and self reported expected grades and attitudes of students to measure student learning. They found that the use of coercive power, and to some extent legitimate power, served to retard both cognitive and affective learning. On the other hand, referent power, and to a lesser extent, expert power, served to enhance learning. Significant by its absence of any association, is reward power. It was found to be unrelated to either cognitive or affective learning. The best case the authors could make for reward power was as an alternative when referent and expert power options did not exist. "Reward power, then, may not have the positive effects which have been claimed for it in the past, but it may be a valuable tool as a substitute for negative approaches when positive approaches are not possible" (McCroskey and Richmond, 1984, p.136).

Working on the assumption that client (employee, student) satisfaction is an important affective outcome of learning, Guditus and Zirkel (1980) conclude that a significant relationship exists between applied power bases and worker satisfaction. Namely, in schools the most influential power base used by principals over teachers was legitimate power, while the least influential were reward and coercive powers. This held true across urban, suburban, and rural schools, grade levels and school size. As principals set the tone for the school, how they are perceived to exercise power should influence teachers in their exercise of power over students. The remaining four power bases did show differences in size of school in which case referent power was ranked second in upper-middle size schools (1000 - 1500 students), but was ranked last in the largest schools (>1500 students). Recent surveys of British Master's Degree students in education and teachers on secondment reveal legitimate power as the primary basis for yielding to the head teacher's influence. Does this suggest head teacher's mostly try to exert influence over mundane matters? These same surveys reveal that although teachers primarily believe students listen to them due to their legitimate power, the remaining power bases share the limelight.

Another way in which power bases and learning are related is the status

characteristics of the person wielding the power, which affect expectations of effectiveness in others (Berger et.al., 1977). Sex of the teacher, for example, is an important status characteristic. Females (most highly represented in elementary schools in particular and in teaching in general), are perceived to be more effective than males in using the female-stereotyped nurturance properties of reward, while males, who are stereotyped as more competent, are perceived to be more effective users of expert power (Wiley & Eskilson, 1982).

Regardless of the power base teachers think they are using, as was reported earlier, what is important is what power bases students perceive teachers as using. McCroskey and Richmond (1983) investigated the degree to which teachers and students have shared perceptions of the use of power in the classroom. Using Richmond's et al., (1980) Perceived Power Measure (PPM), McCroskey and Richmond (1983) conclude, "...teachers have a much more positive view of their behavior (power wielding) than do the students (p.183). Specifically, although teachers and students did not differ in their perceptions of how likely either coercive or legitimate power are used, they did differ on the other three power bases. Teachers saw themselves as more likely to use a higher proportion of reward, referent, and expert powers than did the students, while students saw coercive power as accounting for a higher proportion of power than did the teachers. When such misperceptions occur, the authors suggest the "higher and more meaningful associations will be found between student perceptions of teacher power and their own learning" (p.183).

Tauber and Knouse (1984), in their research into vocational high school teachers' and students' perceptions of power, find students rank teacher applied referent power to be significantly more effective, and coercive power to be significantly less effective in modifying their behavior. No significant differences occurred among the remaining three power bases of expert, reward, and legitimate. Vocational teachers responded with a similar ordering as students, but ranked legitimate power as less effective than reward power, whereas students ranked the two about equally. These students,

alternatively attending a vocational school and an academic high school on a week about basis, perceived their vocational teachers to use referent power and expert power significantly more frequently than their homeschool academic teachers. Homeschool academic teachers, on the other hand, were perceived to use punishment more frequently than the vocational teachers. The votech student's prolonged contact (one full week out of every two weeks) with one shop instructor no doubt gives expert power and referent power more of an opportunity to flourish than the 40 minutes per day contact with academic teachers during the week at the homeschool.

QUESTIONS IN NEED OF INVESTIGATION

If Nyberg's (1981, p.63) earlier quotation stating that "The idea of power has lain more completely neglected in education ..." is true, then educational researchers should find numerous opportunities for investigation. In turn, such research could form the foundation for later developmental efforts by practitioners. The two go hand in hand; one is prerequisite to the other.

Researchers may wish to identify a specific topic, such as "perception of power," and form investigative questions around it. If the topic is perception of power one could ask, "To what degree do teachers and students have the same perceptions of the use of power in the classroom," "To what degree do head teachers (principals) and teachers share the same perceptions of the use of power in the school in general, and in the classroom in particular," or "To what degree do head teachers exert one category of power on teachers and at the same time expect teachers to exert another category of power on students?" To what degree do teachers' (and students') perceptions of most frequently used power bases relate to their perceptions of the most effective power bases? When differences in perceptions occur, whose should be the emphasis of follow-up studies? Although attempts have been made to answer these questions (e.g. McCroskey and Richmond, 1983 & 1984), more investigation is needed.

Are perceptions influenced by the age of administrators, teachers or students? Are

they influenced by the type of school, comprehensive or grammar, in which they are measured? Is sex of the teacher and of the student related, in fact, to power use perceptions? Is socio-economic background, region of the country, ethnic heritage, single or two parent family structure, etc., any determinate of perceptions of power use? Are reliable and valid measures, such as the PPM (Richmond, et. al., 1980) and the Power Perception Profile (Hersey and Natemeyer, 1979), available to measure perceptions of power use?

To what degree do educators perceive their power as having changed over the past decade? If such a change can be measured, can it be related to the emergence of collective bargaining, industrial action, student rights, fewer perceived job opportunities upon graduation, falling rolls, shared-decision making, bans on corporal punishment and other recent legal developments, general aging of teachers, less "new blood" entering the profession, fewer resources, and government required parent governors? Can these perceptions be altered? Is there a relationship between educator applied power and initial teacher training -- Certificate, BEd, or PGCE?

To what extent is it true that teachers (head teachers, parents, etc.) wield power only to the extent that students (others) perceive them to have such power? Why do people consent to power being wielded over them? Is it possible to establish teachers as the real power wielders? Should energy be exerted to try? What effect, if any, should students' power over power (Nyberg, 1981) have on teacher's preservice and inservice training?

Examining each power base individually may be another general topic for investigation. Are some power bases, such as coercive and reward powers, overused and at the same time ineffectively used? Are other power bases overlooked? What methods have been used to formally, as well as informally, teach each power base? Have coercive and reward powers been taught by example -- parents, teachers, clergy? Does reward power, as asserted by McCroskey and Richmond, (1984) really lack the positive effects that have been claimed for it in the past? What conditions contribute to the situation

in which a teacher can exert a high degree of punishment (or rewards) and still have little coercive (or reward) power -- e.g. there is more punishment or reward available from other sources by not complying with the teacher's wishes. Could it be that coercive and reward powers are claimed to be less effective only because they are ineffectively applied -- for instance, negative reinforcement is overlooked as an example of a reward?

How can we enhance teachers' legitimate, referent, and expert powers? What are the limits of a teachers' legitimate, or position, power? Do they overstep these limits? Are they surprised when students call such overstepping to their attention? Are teachers really "born" with referent power or can it be taught? What available models exist to train teachers in skills and attitudes representative of successful referent power wielders? As a personal power, just how wide a sphere of influence over student behavior does referent power project? How hardy and long-lasting is referent power? Is a conscious effort made to exploit the expert power of educators? Does it seem unprofessional to do so? What would be the effect upon a teacher's power base if students, fellow teachers, administrators, and citizens were made to see the expertness within a school's professional staff?

Without going into such depth of questions, other general topics come to mind, especially those dealing with learning outcomes. To what degree is there a relationship between student learning and applied power bases? Does the relationship affect both cognitive and affective learning as suggested by McCroskey and Richmond (1984)? In addition to a suggested relationship of power bases to satisfaction, does one exist with student creativity? Are some power bases more effective with disciplines such as mathematics in which the content is specific, hierarchal, and demanding of closure, while other power bases are more effective with disciplines stressing generalities and diversity?

CONCLUSION

Teachers are being held more and more accountable for the end product of their efforts -- educated students who are capable of successfully coping with an ever changing and demanding world. Whether it is to further learning in general, or discipline in particular, teachers must effectively exercise power. To do so requires a grasp of the power bases available and the potential and limits of each. Here, practitioners need the fruits of educational researchers. In turn, researchers should look upon power, it definition, its categories, its enhancement, and its application, as untilled soil ripe with opportunities for investigation. Power, specifically French and Raven's five power bases, is an appropriate focus for both educational researchers and practitioners.

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